DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 113 541 CE 005 077

AUTHOR Thorson, James A.
TITLE Variations in Attitudes Toward the Aged Held by Selected Groups in the Southern United States.
PUB DATE 27 Jun 75
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the International Congress of Gerontology (10th, Jerusalem, Israel, June 27, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Tests; *Comparative Analysis; *Older Adults; Racial Attitudes; *Social Attitudes; Social Class

ABSTRACT

A three-part study has been conducted over the past several years to isolate and describe correlates of attitudes toward the elderly. The paper briefly summarizes the first two parts of the study and concentrates on its concluding portion. Data from the first part of the study indicated that younger and more well-educated subjects displayed more positive attitudes toward the elderly. Data from the second part of the study showed little relationship between the variables race and socioeconomic status and attitudes toward the aged. The third part of the study tested for relationships between personality characteristics and attitudes toward old people. It was hypothesized that persons high in the trait of nurturance would have more positive attitudes toward the elderly. Data collected using the Edwards Personal Preference Scale showed positive attitudes correlated with high scores for the traits of intraception, nurturance, and endurance. However, demographic factors seem to be more important determinants of attitudes toward old people than are the personality items. Data indicate that females, subjects who are older, and subjects having a higher number of years of education have more positive attitudes toward old people. A list of references is included. (Author/EC)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED113541

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Variations in Attitudes Toward the Aged Held by Selected Groups in the Southern United States

A Paper Presented to the
10th International Congress of Gerontology
Jerusalem, Israel

June 27, 1975

James A. Thorson
Department of Adult Education
and Center for Continuing Education
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602, U.S.A.

CE005077

A three-part study of attitudes toward older people has been conducted at the University of Georgia over the past several years. The state of Georgia is the largest state in terms of land mass in the Eastern portion of the United States, and it has one large urban area, Atlanta, which is the commercial hub for the Southern states. Most of the state is quite rural. Georgia has a wide diversity of persons in its population, and it therefore is an interesting place in which to conduct research on the attitudes of a variety of groups. The research for the present study was conducted throughout the state, in urban and rural areas, among whites and blacks, students and older persons, and among those of middle and lower socio-economic status.

As the first two parts of the study are, or shortly will be, in the literature (Thorson, Whatley and Hancock, 1974; Thorson, 1975), this paper will briefly summarize them and concentrate on the concluding portion of the study.

The objective of the study was to isolate and describe correlates of attitudes toward the elderly. In the first part of the study, the attitudes of a group of professional and para-professional workers (N=59) in programs serving the aging were examined. An instrument developed by Professor Nathan Kogan (1961) was used to measure subjects' attitudes toward the aged. Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People scale (OP) is a 34 item Likert scale; subjects are asked to agree or disagree with statements that are made about older people. The 59 practitioners completed the OP scale, and, for comparison purposes, 61 graduate and under-graduate students at the University of Georgia also were asked to complete the scale. Mean scores were categorized by the age and the level of education of the persons completing the OP scale. Analysis of the resultant data using a t test indicated that younger and more well-educated subjects displayed more positive attitudes toward the elderly. The statistic used

at that point in the study did not determine which element, age or education, contributed to the variance in attitude, although it could be determined that the variance was statistically significant ($p < .01$).

At this point in the study it was suggested that race and socio-economic status might contribute to variations in attitudes toward the elderly. Georgia's population is made up of two major racial groups, whites and blacks, with a very few Native Americans (Indians), and practically no Asians. It was hypothesized that cultural differences between the two races might contribute to differences in attitudes toward old people. Further, as education was evidently an important determinant of attitude, socio-economic status might also enter in as a variable. Lower class persons in this area still do not have the educational advantages of the more affluent, so it was suggested that a relationship existed between educational achievement and social class.

A group was selected that was controlled for age, education, and urban versus rural residence. A group of secondary school students in Atlanta (N=98), all of whom could be classified as urban, and all of whom were at the same age and had the same number of years of education, completed the OP scale. The group was made up of 48 blacks and 50 whites. A panel of instructors at the school was asked to code the questionnaires for each subject, indicating whether he was, in their judgement, of "middle socio-economic status" or "lower socio-economic status." There was no danger of finding a subject of upper socio-economic status in this inner-city school.

TABLE I

Mean Scores by Race and Social Status, Sample 2

Number	Variable	Mean Score*
37	Black, lower status	3.81
11	Black, middle status	3.95
9	White, lower status	3.87
41	White, middle status	3.88

*To be consistent with the scoring method used by Kogan, lower mean scores indicate more positive attitudes toward old people.

Using an analysis of variance procedure, no significant differences in OP score could be found for either the factor of race or of socio-economic status.

The two groups were combined to examine the factors that were known for all subjects, age and education. There were 217 usable questionnaires.

TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance by Group and Variable, Samples I and II

Number	Variable and Sample Group	f	$f_{.95}$	$f_{.99}$
98	Sample group II, by race and social class	.177	2.70	
217	Samples I and II, by subjects' age	2.22	2.65	
217	Samples I and II, by subjects' education	9.24	2.65	3.88

The analysis of variance in this case indicated a quite large variation for the factor of years of education, and a variation that was not significant for the factor of age. It was thus concluded that, for the groups tested, persons having more years of education had significantly more positive attitudes toward old people. The factors of race and social class appeared to be of relatively little importance as determinants of attitudes toward the aged among the group tested in a large southern urban center.

The third part of the study tested for relationships between personality characteristics and attitudes toward old people. It was hypothesized that persons high in the trait of nurturance would have more positive attitudes toward the elderly. The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS) was used to measure various personality characteristics. The EPPS (Edwards, 1959) is a well-validated personality inventory containing scales that give relative scores on 15 different personality factors: achievement, deference, order,

exhibition, autonomy, affiliation, intraception, succorance, dominance, abasement, nurturance, change, endurance, heterosexuality, and aggression.

A group of 212 students at the University of Georgia completed the OP and the EPPS. As this is new data, a detailed intercorrelation matrix of the OP and EPPS variables is presented (Table 3). Significant relationships that were found include: a correlation between intraception and attitude toward old people ($r = -.16$) significant at the .02 level -- persons higher in intraception being more positive toward old people; as hypothesized, a relationship ($r = -.16$) was found indicating a significant ($p < .02$) correlation between nurturance and attitude toward old people; it was also found that there is a significant ($p < .05$) correlation ($r = -.14$) indicating that persons higher in endurance are more positive in their attitudes toward the elderly; further, a significant ($p < .01$) relationship was found indicating that attitude towards old people is negatively correlated ($r = .18$) with the trait of aggression. To summarize, persons having higher EPPS scores for the traits of intraception, nurturance, and endurance were more positively disposed toward the aged; those who displayed a higher score for the characteristic of aggression had more negative attitudes toward older adults.

In addition, analyses of variance were done for the factors of subjects' age, sex, and years of education. These are also presented in detail in the paper (Tables 4, 5, and 6).

TABLE 4

Analysis of Variance - OP Score by Age

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	f_{Ratio}	$f_{Probability}$
Between Groups	2	6,838.00	3419.00	7.538	0.001
Within Groups	209	94,792.00	453.55		
Total	211	101,630.00			

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Below age 20	6	120.67	10.93
Ages 20 to 25	143	111.72	19.85
Above age 25	63	100.08	24.84
Total Group	212	108.51	21.95

Of the 212 subjects, half were between the ages of 18 and 22; the others ranged upward from 23 to the age of 53. Broken into three groups, those below age 20, those aged 20 to 25, and those above age 25, it is evident from the analysis of variance that their is a highly ($p<.001$) significant variance in attitude by age. For the group tested, attitude toward old people becomes increasingly more positive as age of the subject increases.

The group was made up of 98 males and 114 females, and an analysis of variance was done to differentiate attitude by sex of the respondent.

TABLE 5

Analysis of Variance - OP Score by Sex

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	f_{Ratio}	$f_{Probability}$
Between Groups	1	6,619.00	6,619.00	14.63	0.000
Within Groups	210	95,011.00	452.43		

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Male	98	11[illegible].54	22.06
Female	114	103.33	20.57
Total Group	212	108.51	21.95

Females indicated a significantly ($p < .0001$) more positive attitude toward the aged than the males.

Years of education again proved to be a determinant of attitude toward old people.

TABLE 6

Analysis of Variance - OP Score by Student Status

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	f_{Ratio}	$f_{Probability}$
Between Groups	2	3,898.00	1,949.00	4.168	0.016
Within Groups	209	97,732.00	467.62		
Total	211	101,630.00			

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Freshmen and Sophomores	14	104.71	26.30
Juniors and Seniors	121	112.22	19.25
Graduate Students	77	103.38	24.14
Total Group	212	108.51	21.95

Subjects were categorized into three groups: freshmen and sophomores, juniors and seniors, and graduate students. The analysis of variance indicated a

significant ($p<.02$) relationship was present but did not differentiate between the three groups. The computer program used provides the Duncan Multiple Range procedure, and it indicated that graduate students held significantly more positive attitudes toward older persons than did the undergraduates.

Conclusion

The third part of the study provided more useful data upon which to base conclusions than did the first or second parts. It is evident that demographic factors are more important determinants of attitude toward old people than are the personality items. Although significant correlations were found between OP score and four of the EPPS scales, they were low level and cannot be judged to be particularly meaningful.

Stronger correlations were found between OP scores and subject's age ($r = -.30$) and sex ($r = -.26$). It should be noted that samples were not random and results therefore are not generalizable to the population of Georgia as a whole. However, the data does give an indication in relative terms of how various groups in the Southeastern United States perceive older adults. It is evident that females, subjects who are themselves older, and subjects having a higher number of years of education have the more positive attitudes toward old people.

As the present study was cross-sectional in nature, it would be interesting to follow a particular group in their scores on the OP or a similar scale to see if images of old people improve as the subjects become older. Another suggestion for further research would be to look for correlates of OP score and intelligence, as there is an obvious relationship between intelligence and academic achievement. Those of higher intellectual capacity might well be expected to more readily reject popular untrue stereotypes of the elderly.

References

Barron, Milton. "Minority Group Characteristics of the Aged in American Society," Journal of Gerontology, 1953, 8 , 477-81.

Bennett, Ruth, and Eckman, Judith. "Attitudes toward Aging: A Critical Examination of Recent Literature and Implications for Future Research," in Carl Eisdorfer and M. Powell Lawton (Eds.) The Psychology of Adult Development and Aging. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1973, 575-597.

Edwards, Allen L. Edwards Personal Preference Schedule Manual. New York: The Psychological Corporation, 1959.

Gillis, Sister Marion, "Attitudes of Nursing Personnel toward the Aged," Nursing Research, 1973, 22, 517-520.

Golde, Peggy, and Kogan, Nathan. "A Sentence Completion Procedure for Assessing Attitudes Toward Old People." Journal of Gerontology, 1959, 14, 355-363.

Kastenbaum, R. and Durkee, N. "Young People View Old Age," in R. Kastembaum (Ed.) New Thoughts on Old Age. New York: Springer, 1964.

Kogan, Nathan, "Attitudes Toward Old People: The Development of a Scale and an Examination of Correlates," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1961, 62, 44-54.

Kogan, N. and Shelton, F.C. "Beliefs about 'Old People': A Comparative Study of Older and Younger Samples." Journal of Genetic Psychology, 1962, 100, 93-111. A.

Kogan, Nathan, and Shelton, Florence C. "Images of 'Old People' and 'People in General' in an Older Sample." Journal of Genetic Psychology, 1962, 100, 3-21. B.

McTavish, Donald G. "Perceptions of Old People: A Review of Research Methodologies and Findings," The Gerontologist, Part II, 1971 (Winter), 11, 90-101.

Silverman, I. "Response-set Bias and Predictive Validity Associated with Kogan's 'Attitudes Toward Old People Scale,'" Journal of Gerontology, 1966, 21, 86-88.

Thorson, J. "Attitudes Toward the Aged as A Function of Race and Social Class," The Gerontologist, 1975, 15, (in press).

Thorson, J., Whatley, L., and Hancock, K. "Attitudes Toward the Aged as a Function of Age and Education," The Gerontologist. 1974, 14, 316-318.

Tuckman, Jacob, and Lorge, Irving. "Attitudes Toward Aging of Individuals with Experiences with the Aged." Journal of Genetic Psychology, 1958 92, 199-204.

Tuckman, Jacob, and Lorge, Irving. "Attitudes Toward Old People," Journal of Social Psychology, 1953, 37, 249-260.